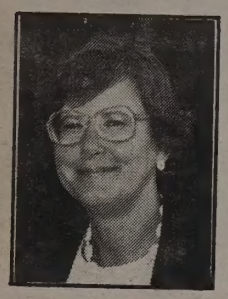
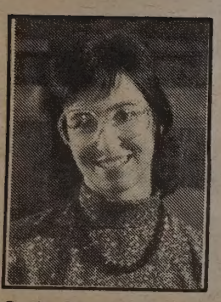
Wendy Lehman

Loretta Courtney

Heather Byrne

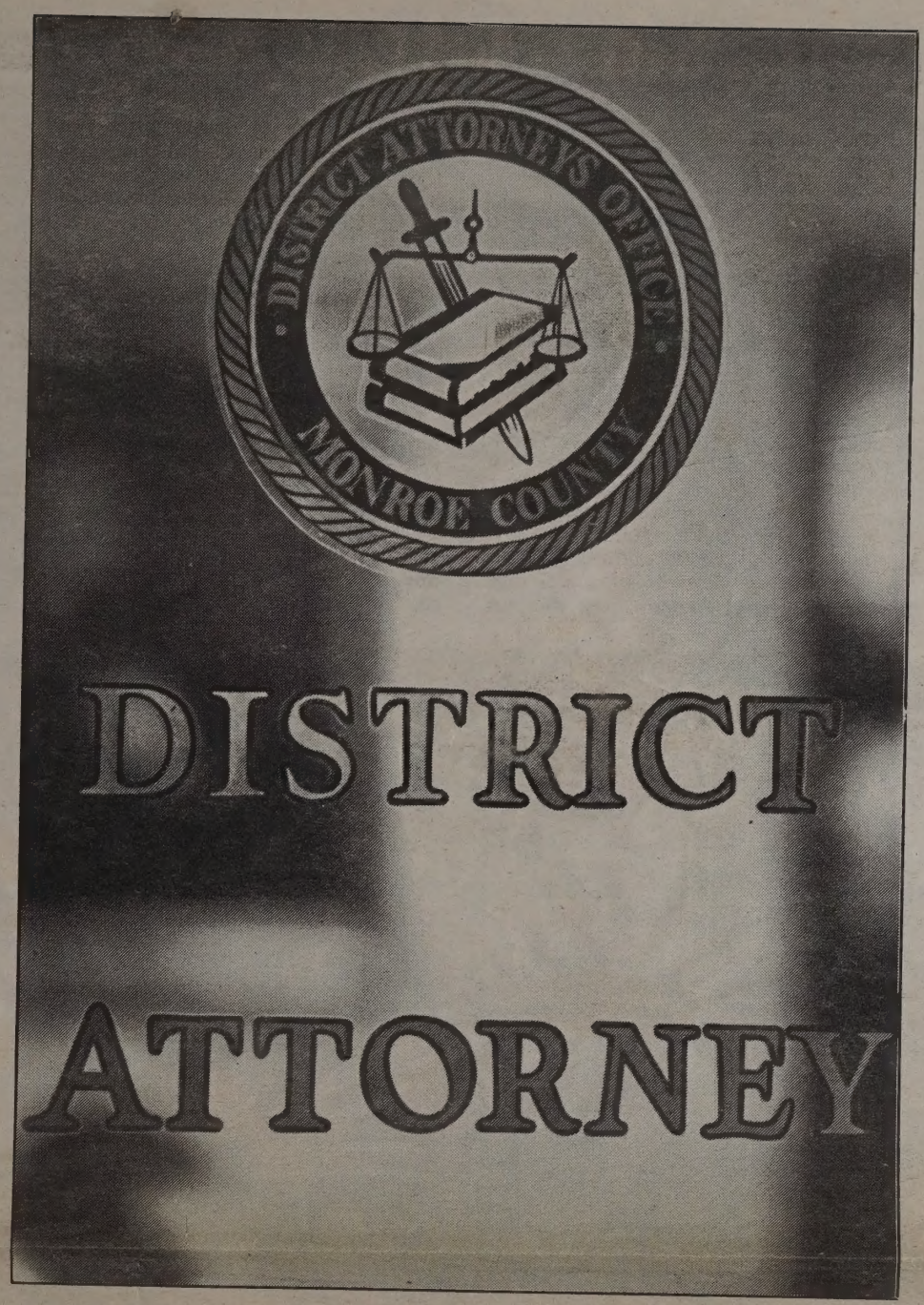


Neva Flaherty



Carla Santirocco

Mary Beth Albright



Maureen Byrne

Louise Boillat

Janice Iati

Barbara Barton

Mary Ann Hawco

Joan Psaila

Nadine Pellegrini

Karla Boyce

Nancy Smith

Bridgett Abraham

Maureen Pineau

Linda Lohner

All Attorneys Are Created Equal

Distaff D.A.s Take the Stand

By FRAN CRUIKSHANK
Managing Editor

Monroe County's 45-year-old District Attorney, Howard Relin, says the reason on his office has 22 female assistant district attorneys out of a staff of 60 is simple. "They are very good attorneys."

"We have made no conscious effort to hire females," he said, "they have just been better candidates."

In Syracuse, Onondaga's District Attorney's office has five female assistant district attorneys out of 30. In Buffalo, the Erie County District Attorney's office has 20 females out of a staff of 64. Onondaga County has a population of about 500,000; Erie County has about 1.2 million; and Monroe County has about 702,000.

The practice of law, usually regarded as men's work, has seen tremendous changes in the past decade. The number of women students in the law schools is more than in the engineering or medical schools. "During an eight-month period three years ago," said Relin, "we hired six women and no men. The women had better qualifications. Many, many times they have better grades. We feel very fortunate to have them in this office."

Lawrence Kurlander, now head of the New York State Criminal Justice System, was the first Monroe County DA to hire a female assistant district attorney in 1976. That was Patricia Marks who went on to become the first female County Court Judge.

Relin said that when he was in law school in 1968, there were two women in his class. "One dropped and one graduated," he said.

This fall's first year law school classes throughout the country number almost 45 percent women.

"One of the interesting things," said Relin, "is that people tend to think of prosecutors as men who are a little overbearing and harsh. Women are seen as softer. This gives them a real advantage with a jury that doesn't think of women as being tough cross examiners. The women do cross examine, but they get away with it."

"The best part of having women district attorneys, said Relin, is these women don't want any special favors. They are capable, competent, serious practicioners of the law, and want to be treated the same way men are."

Out of the nine Bureau Chiefs in the District Attorney's office, three are women.

Mary Ann Hawco is the first woman to become Second Assistant District Attorney. Donald Chesworth, Donald Wisner, and Howard Relin preceded her in that position. In this spot, she is in charge of all the county court district attorneys and fills in the duites of what used to be the chief trial assistant. She knows who is going to trial, what is happening in the trials and what the results are. She schedules the trials and the DAs to fill in where needed. She also works with judges and their calendars.

Hawco was a public defender for three years in Buffalo. She "switched sides" and came to the Monroe County DA office and was the first female head of the Violent Felony Bureau before becoming the first female to be the

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Women

Continued from page 5

Second District Attorney.

When Marks went to the judge's seat, Kathy Majewski replaced her as head of the White Collar Crime Bureau. Majewski is on maternity leave at the moment. As chief of this bureau, she supervises all the white collar cases, evaluates them and continues to try cases. Her latest was the case of Helen Blum of Canandaigua who was convicted and sentenced for investment fraud of more than $1 million.

Nadine Pellegrini is the first female head of the Major Felony Offense Bureau. She replaced Hawco. A 1978 graduate of Albany Law School, she said working in the Monroe County DA office is her fist job and she plans to stay. She met her husband, Douglas Stoddart, there who "is a member of my bureau." He just got three convictions in the Rico case. "Michael Rhymes was one of four defendants involved in the Rico Bar homicide. Relin got the fourth conviction.

Neva Flaherty, former newspaper reporter, graduated from Cornell Law School in 1981. She has done stints in city and town courts and is now attached to the DWI Bureau. She also worked with Hawco and Joan Psalia on the Rochester Psychiatric Center investigation. "Many legislative and administrative changes were recommended as a result of our work," Flaherty said. "We were very pleased with the results."

Joan Psalia, graduated from Syracuse Law School. From there she did a clerkship in the second highest court in the state. She also served in the city and town courts. When there was an opening in the Appeals Bureau, she moved into that spot. "I found my niche," she said. "I love it here. This office is unique in that if we write the appeal, we argue it. That isn't true of all District Attorney offices."

She is on her way to Albany next week to argue a case before the Court of Appeals.

"When we interviewed her, we realized we had one of the brightest people we had ever heard," said Relin. "Believe me, we signed her up as quickly as we could. Appeals is a good place for her."

Wendy Lehmann, also of the Appeals Bureau, is Deputy Bureau Chief. Melvin Bressler is the chief. "We all work well together," said Bressler. "They are good attorneys."

Loretta Courtney, a graduate nurse, started law school wahen she was 35. She moved here from Michigan after serving an internship with the Legal

K. Majewski and children.

Service Corps. "Because of my high visibility," she said, "everyone in the jury watches me closely. I almost get a high when I sense I have them with me. We are all even before a jury and you either know what you are doing or you don't."

Maureen Byrne, Nazareth College and Notre Dame Law School, is attached to the DWI bureau. She just beat three defense attorneys whose practice is largely defending DWIs. "The exciting and rewarding part of that," she said, "was all of the defendants had refused to take the Breathalyzer test. I had to prove the defendants were driving while intoxicated by getting the facts out through witnesses and taking those facts and arguing them. Some of the cases had motor vehicle accidents as well as a DWI charge. All the juries came back "guilty as charged."

Byrne had interned in the U.S. Attorney's office and had an opportunity to see what prosecutors do. She liked what she saw well enough to become one of Monroe County's top prosecutors. She has also been through the city and town court routine. "I enjoy trial work," she said.

"And, we enjoy having her," said Relin. "We certainly were delighted with the three convictions she just got."

Relin said he insists on having a competent staff. If that means hiring women, then that is what he said he would do. Also, having women is important for some victims. "We had a 14-year-old girl who had alledgedly been sexually abused. if we hadn't had some women for her to talk to, she probably would have just disappeared and the four defendants would have gone free. Fortunately, she related to the women and the defendants were found guilty as charged. Two of them are serving life sentences as they were convicted of kidnapping first degree which is a Class A felony. Hawco and Pellegrini worked on this case,"said Relin.

"We did the case against four male defendants and four male defense attorneys," said Pellegrini. "It was a good win."

Some assistant attorneys leave after the customary three years. But then some return, said Pellegrini. "For instance, Nancy Smith worked here and then left to work in a private firm. We kept in touch with her and learned that she not only missed us but also trial work. When there was an opening she came back. She, too, is here to stay."

Smith is in the Domestic/Child Abuse Department.

Barbara Barton, Buffalo Law School graduate, has taken on the City Court work with gusto. "She has also had a felony DWI trial and is considered to

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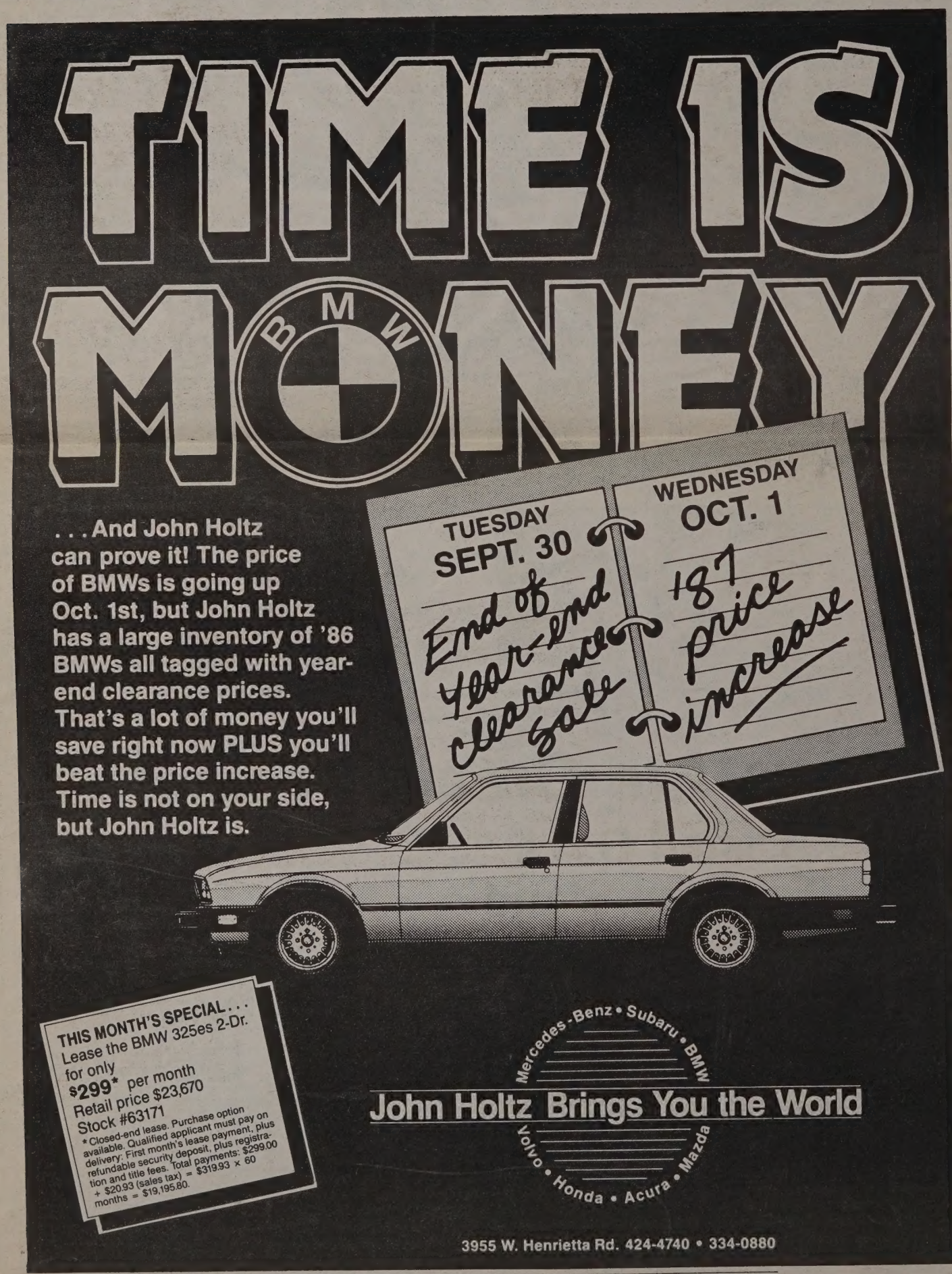
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